

Università di Cagliari



Corso di Laurea in Lingue e Comunicazione

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The Structure of the English Sentence



The word Syntax – from the Latin *syntaxis* and earlier from the Greek *σύνταξις* – means things arranged together.

It refers to the branch of Linguistics which studies the way in which words are arranged in units to show relationships of meaning.

Such units are the *phrase*, the *clause*, and the *sentence*

(in Italian, SINTAGMA, PROPOSIZIONE, FRASE O PERIODO)

DISCOURSE LEVEL

Sentence Connectivity

Larger than the sentence text

We arrived at the shop just as the butcher was clearing away. As a result the big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones, and the little puppies liked the scraps.

SENTENCE LEVEL

Sentence

the big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones, and the little puppies liked the scraps.

CLAUSE LEVEL

Clause

the big dogs enjoyed their unexpected bones

PHRASE LEVEL

Phrase

their unexpected bones

WORD LEVEL

Word

un- expect -ed

The Structure of the English Sentence

Morphology and Syntax.

Form and Function.

In English the function of words is linked to their position in a sentence.

The importance of Word Order:

Dog chases cat	VS	Cat chases dog
They are at home	VS	Are they at home?
Only I saw the thief	VS	I saw the thief only

Subject vs Object; Position of the verb; Position of the adverb.

The Structure of the English Sentence



Sentences are constructions that can stand on their own as statements, and have a syntactic structure, generally made of a subject and a predicate.

In writing, a sentence is any sequence of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop (or period), a question mark or an exclamation mark.

The Structure of the English Sentence



1. She asked for a book.
2. Come in.
3. The horse ran away because the train was noisy.

The sentence is the largest unit to which syntactic rules apply.

SENTENCE WORD ORDER

The English language generally follows a strict word order in the affirmative and interrogative sentences:

AFFIRMATIVE SENTENCES

Subject/Verb/Object: SVO

HE DRIVES A CAR

THEY FOLLOW THE ROAD

THE DOCTOR IS COMING (*translate into Italian*)

IT IS A BEAUTIFUL DAY (*translate into Italian*)

Why?

Lack of inflection

SENTENCE WORD ORDER

QUESTIONS OR INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES HAVE INVERTED WORD ORDER.

THEY MUST ALWAYS CONTAIN AN AUXILIARY VERB;

Aux. Verb/S/Verb/ Obj.

ARE THEY HAPPY?

DOES HE DRIVE A CAR?

WAS HE TALKING TO YOU?

SENTENCES (PERIODO-FRASE) BEGIN WITH A CAPITAL LETTER AND END WITH A FULL STOP.

SENTENCE WORD ORDER

for and Macintosh Windows available
Hot Potatoes is

HOT POTATOES IS AVAILABLE FOR MACINTOSH
AND WINDOWS

went skating Mark and Sally on Saturday

MARK AND SALLY WENT SKATING ON SATURDAY

way cool ice cream eating is to good
off a

EATING ICE CREAM IS A GOOD WAY TO COOL OFF

SENTENCE WORD ORDER

swimming go ? Kelly and I allowed
are to

the and walked store candy Mary some bought
to :

ice
cream nuts top on like and I chocolate with
syrup

TYPES OF SENTENCES



Major sentences, or regular sentences, are the most frequent.

They can be broken down into a specific and logical pattern of elements: **Subject/Verb/Object**

The professor **bought many books** for his library;

The price of petrol **has been rising**

TYPES OF SENTENCES



Minor sentences, or irregular sentences, use patterns that cannot be analyzed formally, as they are idiosyncratic, though easily recognizable and comprehensible, typical of spoken language and popular writings (press, ads, websites)

MINOR SENTENCES

Proverbs and typical expressions, formulaic expressions (non finite predicates):

God save the Queen; Wish you were here.

First come first served;

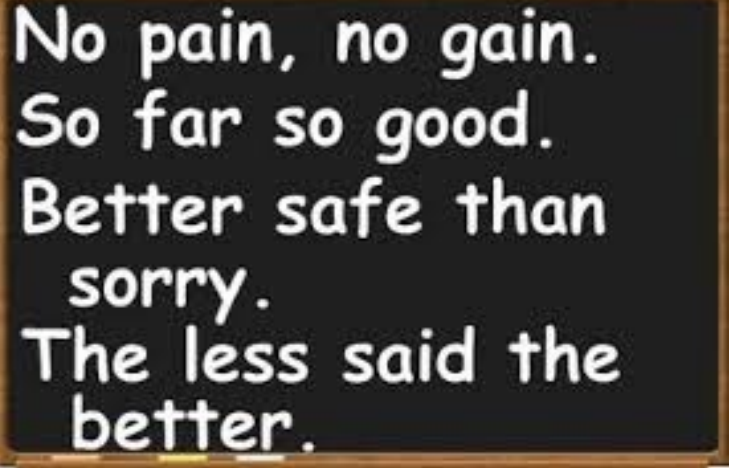
How do you do? (introductions)

Nice day! Taxi! All aboard!

But also emotive interjections: eh? Ugh!, Wow! Ow! Shh!

Minor sentences

Recurse to nominalization and non-finite verbs



No pain, no gain.
So far so good.
Better safe than sorry.
The less said the better.



DRUG
FREE
SCHOOL
ZONE



iPhone 5c ©
For the colorful.



Bless
you!

Minor sentences – Disjunctive grammar – block sentences

They appear in newspaper headlines, labels, ads, notices, headings.

Recurse to nominalization and non finite verbs:

“GENTLEMAN’S BATHROOM”

“APPLICATION FOR VISA”

«Ex-Fifa president Blatter and ex-Uefa boss Platini charged with fraud»



THE SENTENCE



A sentence is any sequence of words beginning with a capital letter and ending with a full stop, ?, !

IT MUST CONTAIN **ONE OR MORE CLAUSES (PROPOSIZIONE):**

I quickly shut the door.

I quickly shut the door (**INDEPENDENT CLAUSE**), before the dog could come in (**DEPENDENT CLAUSE**).

SENTENCES



Examples of simple (ONE VERB) sentence structures:

John carefully searched the room

The girl is now a student at a large university

His brother grew happier gradually

It rained steadily all day

SIMPLE SENTENCES



SIMPLE SENTENCES CONSIST OF ONE FINITE CLAUSE.

THE LENGTH OF A SIMPLE SENTENCE IS NOT FUNDAMENTAL.

THE ELEMENTS WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT, OBJECT OR ADVERBIAL OF THE SENTENCE DO NOT LIMIT ITS SIMPLICITY:

A number of people saw the terrible accident in the early afternoon

Multiple Sentences

As we mentioned earlier, sentences which contain only one clause (1 finite predicate) are called simple sentences.

Multiple sentences can be analysed into more than one clause and are the majority in formal writing.

Multiple sentences are of two broad kinds: compound and complex

Multiple Sentences

A COMPOUND SENTENCE CONSISTS OF MORE FINITE CLAUSES LINKED TOGETHER BY A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION (AND, OR, BUT):

He has quarrelled with the chairman, and has resigned;

The baby was crying but his mother wasn't listening.

Complex Sentences

A COMPLEX SENTENCE CONTAINS TWO OR MORE FINITE CLAUSES, OR "SENTENCE-LIKE" CONSTRUCTIONS WITHIN IT, LINKED TOGETHER SO THAT ONE IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE OTHER:

- 1: **It is late** (simple independent sentence)
- 2: **Because it is late** (subordinate or dependent clause)
- 3: **I am going home because it is late** (complex sentence: independent with dependent).

Complex Sentences

I am going home because it is late

Here, the sentence as a whole contains the *sentence-like* construction "because it is late".

It is a sentence-like because it has its own Subject, *it*, and its own Verb, *is*.

We refer to this construction as A CLAUSE (*Proposizione* in Italian).

In the case of our sentence, it is the **subordinate** or **dependent clause**

SENTENCE ELEMENTS/PATTERNS

5-6 (according to subdivision of complements) types of elements in a simple sentence, each expressing a particular kind of meaning.

The first element is the Subject, which identifies its theme or topic.

The Subject (S) of a sentence can often be identified by asking a question with **who** or **what**.

Jane broke the lamp. Who broke the lamp? Jane (S)

The bridge was very old. What was very old? The bridge (S)

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Usually the subject is a noun, pronoun or clause.

The boy was a good pianist; He was a good pianist;
What he liked doing best was playing the piano.

The position of the Subject is normally before the predicate (verb) in a statement. In questions, it follows an auxiliary verb:

They all went to the beach; Did they all go to the beach?

The Subject controls the verb form, the objects and pronouns:

I go vs. She goes; I washed myself vs They washed themselves

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

The Predicate or Verb expresses a wide range of meanings: actions, processes, states of being;

It is the most necessary element in a sentence and can never be omitted, unless in the case of minor sentences.

Verb types:

Transitive v.: **The soldiers destroyed the church.**

These verbs cannot occur alone in the Predicate of a sentence.

They require another sentence element to complete its meaning.

In this case the element is called **Direct Object**.

Intransitive v.: **Jane laughed; the sky darkened; the temperature dropped**

They can occur alone in the Predicate because they don't require other sentence elements to complete their meaning.

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

VERBS WITH BOTH TRANSITIVE AND INTRANSITIVE
MEANING:

Grow:

Shake:

Change:

Pay attention to: **RISE** and **RAISE**:

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

The Object identifies who or what has been affected by the action of the verb.

The object is usually a noun, a pronoun or a clause:

The sea washed away the footprints; the sea washed away them;

She said he had been a fool.

Direct object: that sentence element affected by the action of the verb. What ? Whom?

The soldiers destroyed the church. What did they destroy?

The church (DO)

The police interviewed the suspect. Whom did they interview?

The suspect (DO).

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Indirect object: some sentences can have two Objects:

She gave me some money

The 2 objects here are ME and SOME MONEY. The element SOME MONEY (what did she give me?) is the DIRECT OBJECT.

The university granted Jo a scholarship;

He told his wife the truth;

They asked him a lot of questions;

The postman brought us a parcel.

Such sentences with the pattern: S V IO DO can often become:

The university granted a scholarship to Jo.

They asked a lot of questions to him....

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Direct Object

- 1 The government has promised an end to age discrimination in the workplace.
- 2 Most people welcomed the government's change of policy.
- 3 However, some people expressed doubts about the proposed legislation.
- 4 They are demanding a more comprehensive review of employment law.
- 5 A Select Committee will discuss the issue next month.
- 6 The Committee is still accepting submissions.
- 7 Some people question the need for such extensive consultation.
- 8 The Opposition will raise the question during the next parliamentary session.

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Exercise 1.4 Indirect Object (section 1.7)

Underline the Indirect Object in each of the sentences below.

- 1 Send me your email address, please.
- 2 He owes the bank a lot of money.
- 3 We've promised Paul a laptop for his birthday.
- 4 Can you tell us the way to King's Cross?
- 5 He is teaching the children French.
- 6 I've emailed you my details.
- 7 She gave the bridegroom a kiss.
- 8 They made both candidates the same offer.

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Direct and Indirect Objects

Use each of the verbs below to make a sentence containing a direct and an indirect object.

GIVE, PAY, ASK, FIND, CHARGE, COOK,
SHOW, READ, TELL, OFFER, COST

SENTENCE ELEMENTS



The Complement gives extra information about the subject or object. It can also be substituted with a noun, pronoun, adjective or numeral:

The house was a bargain; that book is his; the concert was excellent; my mother is 70.

The Subject Complement is the element following a linking verb, such as *be, seem, appear, get, smell, become* (also known as copula verbs):

The house appeared empty; He became Prime Minister; They seem happy; The sun gets hotter and hotter....

SENTENCE ELEMENTS



The Object Complement is the element following the DO and referring to it:

They elected him Treasurer; Jane called her a fool;
The teacher considered her pupil a genius.

NOTE:

The manager made Jones director (S V DO C)

The manager made Jones coffee (S V IO DO)

Cfr. Nelson Ex. pp 26-27 (keys 145-146)

SENTENCE ELEMENTS



Exercise 1.6 Object Complement (section 1.8)

Underline the Object Complement in each of the sentences below.

- 1 Seafood can sometimes make people ill.
- 2 I usually find science fiction movies very boring.
- 3 They have named the baby Apple.
- 4 He proclaimed himself President of the new republic.
- 5 In 2006, *Time* magazine named him Person of the Year.
- 6 The alcohol made him drowsy.
- 7 He was appointed Chief Justice in 2008.
- 8 He calls himself the king of the jungle.

SENTENCE ELEMENTS



Adverbials refer to both adverbs and to the syntactic element functioning as an adverb.

They can be found within the predicate and modify or specify the verb giving extra information about:

TIME: tomorrow, now; **PLACE**: near, far; **MANNER**: strongly, well;
REASON: because, because of, to....

WHERE? WHEN? HOW? WHY?

SENTENCE ELEMENTS



In English, adverbials most commonly take the form of adverbs, adverb phrases, temporal noun phrases or prepositional phrases. Many types of adverbials (for instance reason and condition) are often expressed by CLAUSES.

*James answered **immediately**.* (adverb)

*James answered **in English**.* (prepositional phrase)

*James answered **this morning**.* (noun phrase)

*James answered in English **because he had a foreign visitor**.*
(adverbial clause).

SENTENCE ELEMENTS

Adverbials are typically divided into 4 classes:

Adverbial complements are adverbials that render a sentence ungrammatical and meaningless if removed.

*John put the flowers **in a vase**.*

Adjuncts: these are part of the core meaning of the sentence, but if omitted still leave a meaningful sentence.

*John and Sophia helped me **with my homework**.*

Conjuncts (also conjunctions) : these link two sentences together.

*John helped so I was, **therefore**, able to do my homework.*

Disjuncts: these make comments on the meaning of the rest of the sentence.

***Surprisingly**, he passed all of his exams.*

Exercise 1.7 The six sentence patterns (section 1.10) and Adjuncts (section 1.12)

- 1 In tropical rainforests (A), bird life (S) is usually (A) very exotic and colourful (SC).
- 2 The appearance of birds (S) is seasonal (SC).
- 3 Sometimes (A), the arrival of flowers and fruits (S) will attract birds (DO).
- 4 The dense canopy of leaves (S) makes the rainforest (DO) very dark (OC).
- 5 At ground level (A), you (S) can occasionally (A) see kingfishers (DO).
- 6 The constant gloom and enormous tree trunks (S) give the rainforest (IO) the appearance of a cathedral (DO).
- 7 The forest stretches three hundred miles eastwards (AC).

In the spaces provided, indicate the function of each underlined element in the following sentences. Use the following abbreviations:

A = Adjunct

AC = Adverbial Complement

DO = Direct Object

IO = Indirect Object

S = Subject

SC = Subject Complement

OC = Object Complement

- 1 In tropical rainforests (), bird life () is usually () very exotic and colourful ().
- 2 The appearance of birds () is seasonal ().
- 3 Sometimes (), the arrival of flowers and fruits () will attract birds ().
- 4 The dense canopy of leaves () makes the rainforest () very dark ().
- 5 At ground level (), you () can occasionally () see kingfishers ().
- 6 The constant gloom and enormous tree trunks () give the rainforest () the appearance of a cathedral ().
- 7 The forest stretches three hundred miles eastwards ().

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS

4 Classical types of sentence function:

STATEMENT, QUESTION, COMMAND, EXCLAMATION

A statement or declarative sentence is a sentence whose purpose is to state, i.e. to convey information.

Statements traditionally have a declarative structure, in the sense that they declare or make something known

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS



A question or interrogative sentence is a sentence which seeks information.

3 types of questions:

- Yes-no questions
- Wh-questions
- Alternative questions (containing the connective *or*).

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS



Commands or directives are sentences which instruct someone to do something.

Commanding, Inviting, Warning, Pleading,
Suggesting, Advising, Permitting, Requesting,
Mediating, Expressing good wishes, Expressing an
imprecation

SENTENCE FUNCTIONS



Exclamations are sentences which show that a person has been impressed or roused by something.

Single word or short phrase:

Oh Dear!

Gosh!

What a mess!

How nice!

WORD ORDER- SENTENCE ELEMENTS- SENTENCE FUNCTIONS



Cfr:
G. Nelson: pp: 8-28;
L. Pinnavaia: pp. 59-65;
The Cambridge Encyclopedia: chapter 16.